

## Asia Pacific Media Educator

---

| Issue 4

Article 19

---

1-1998

### **Response by Eric P. Louw and Damine Kingsbury to Mazlan Nordin's article, "Don't preach to ASEAN without heeding your own advice" published in APME, July to December, 1997**

D. M. Nordin  
*New Straits Times Press, Malaysia*

E. P. Louw  
*Charles Sturt University*

D. Kingsbury  
*Monash University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme>

---

#### **Recommended Citation**

Nordin, D. M.; Louw, E. P.; and Kingsbury, D., Response by Eric P. Louw and Damine Kingsbury to Mazlan Nordin's article, "Don't preach to ASEAN without heeding your own advice" published in APME, July to December, 1997, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 4, 1998, 151-155.  
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss4/19>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

## Letter To APME

Email all letters to: [eric\\_loo@uow.edu.au](mailto:eric_loo@uow.edu.au)

**Datuk Mazlan Nordin**, Editorial Consultant of *New Straits Times Press*, Malaysia wrote a critique of two articles which appeared in *AsiaPacific MediaEducator* (Issue No.2, January-June 1997). In his critique, "*Don't Preach to ASEAN Without Heeding Own Advice*" published in the *New Straits Times* on 5 September, 1997 and re-produced in APME (Issue No. 3, July-Dec 1997, p.162-165), Datuk Mazlan said in part:

"Often advised on how to do their job by non-professionals are newspaper journalists. The discourse would come from ministers, politicians including those in the opposition, government functionaries and academics, among others. An example of the critical academic discourse is of articles in the *Asia Pacific Media Educator*. Of relevance to ASEAN is a piece on how Australian journalists should report their country's Asian neighbours, namely Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. It begins with the finding that since the 1970's, their reportage has been regarded as a source of friction between the governments of the three countries and Australia.

Mentioned was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's complaint about Australian journalism then, especially with the raising of environmental issues and human rights. There was Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's criticism of the Australian media for "preaching" and his view of Australia as little more than an economic, political and social basket case. And that if Australians were not careful, they would become the "white trash of Asia". There was also the criticism from Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong about some Australians talking too much and doing too little.

The writer, Damien Kingsbury is a freelance journalist and has written a doctoral thesis on Australian reporting of Indonesia. Of interest, therefore, would be his views on measures taken later by Paul Keating, then the Australian Prime Minister, to establish a sort of special relationship between Australia and Indonesia.

Touching on censorship Kingsbury quotes a Singaporean journalism student in Australia whose class assignments included "fairly simple and relatively uncontroversial stories in Australian terms" which she thought would preclude her from becoming a

©AsiaPacific  
MediaEducator  
Issue No.4  
Jan-June 1998

journalist in Singapore. Would it really be so? Would such simple and uncontroversial items not find space in *The Straits Times*? As visitors to the republic will note the paper is doing tremendously well.

Comes then a story about a Malaysian journalist. Quote: "And then there was a Malaysian colleague who reported from Kuala Lumpur and was torn between the requirements to report for an Australian news service and domestic restrictions on the media. His position had become increasingly tenuous and some Australians in Kuala Lumpur had arranged a bolt-hole for the colleague in the event that the Malaysian Government tired of warning him and decided to act. The plan was that he would be spirited to Australia as a political refugee. As it turned out, he jumped before being pushed and is now an Australian resident."

There we have it again. One of hundreds of Malaysian journalists, and out of 20 million Malaysian, flees to Australia and it becomes a big story to the Australian writer. And we ask: any other "bolt holes" being readied? Do be careful, chums. Pauline Hanson will clobber you for bringing more Asians to Australia.

Advice of another hue is given by Eric Louw as he writes on "*Parallel media response to racial policies in Malaysia and new South Africa*". In his view the *Bumiputera* (indigenous Malays) policy as developed in Malaysia in the 1970s seems to have been exported to South Africa where it is called affirmative action. Mention is made of African National Congress personnel visiting Malaysia to learn about the *Bumiputera* policy.

In implementing the policy, Louw explained, the ANC government has replaced white employees with blacks in the government service, state enterprises, police and the armed forces. By 1996, the proportion of general jobs occupied by black people has risen by 50 per cent since 1993, and is expected to rise over the next three years.

Touching on the media in South Africa the writer said that both President Nelson Mandela and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki had warned the press for "not representing the views of the (black) majority", and for not having "too white" an ownership and staffing structure. Meanwhile in the Government-owned broadcasting corporation more than 900, mostly white, employees had quit and 68 percent of the replacements were blacks.

Louw argues that claims about the New Economic Policy benefiting Malays and affirmative action benefiting blacks "is nonsense". In his opinion those policies are "to the benefit of a small group of Malays and a small group of black South Africans".

Asked then by him is how journalists should respond to such situations. Should journalists "assist" governments in the midst of difficult social transformations and should they consider

the past when reporting on the present. But surely for journalists in Malaysia and the new South Africa there is no turning back to May 13, 1969 and the daily trauma of apartheid rule imposed by whites?"

---

**REPLY to Datuk Mazlan Nordin from DR ERIC LUOW, Charles Sturt University-Bathurst. (Email: e.luow@csu.edu.au)**

"If there is one group of people who should be able to empathise with academics it is journalists -- after all both journalists and academics spend much of their time asking questions; trying to find answers; and then sharing these with other people. Yet this is not how veteran journalist Datuk Mazlan Nordin responded to my article *"Parallel media response to racial policies in Malaysia and the new South Africa"*. Instead, (judging from his emotive response), he read it as an attack on Malaysian *bumiputera* journalists, and by extension an attack on himself. My article was never intended as an exercise in "preaching to ASEAN" or as an attack on ASEAN journalists. Further, it was not an exercise in providing answers; rather it was an exercise in asking questions.

My article was centrally concerned with pointing to the complexities of societies like Malaysia and South Africa. I suspect that Mazlan Nordin would share with me an irritation with those Western journalists who fail to appreciate this complexity, and who consequently misread (and so mis-report) Asian and African societies. I, for one, have often been quite appalled by some (past and present) Australian and American reporting live on South Africa, because they so often miss the point and tend to (inappropriately) read Australian and US agendas (and prejudices) into South African issues.

Similarly, although I have not visited Malaysia, I can certainly think myself into that context. Hence, on at least one occasion last year I was critical of an Australian report about Malaysia because it struck me as simplistic and ethnocentric. In short, many of the questions I raised in my article were actually addressed to Western journalists rather than to ASEAN journalists.

If I might venture a tentative proposal concerning a means for addressing the "mis-reporting" of Afro-Asian complexity, it would be the creation of Journalism Diploma courses specifically targeted at journalists about to do a tour of duty in Asian or African contexts. These diplomas would, amongst other thing, seek to introduce these journalists to the sorts of societal complexities they